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Faculty Speak Out For Sloan

Aug. 23, 2003

Although Aug. 21 does not officially mark the end of summer on the calendar, it was a day that marked the beginning of fall at Baylor as new students moved in. Many also hoped it marked the end of a relentless barrage of media attention on the University and a return to a college's true focus: education.

As incoming freshmen and their parents unloaded trailers, SUVs and minivans to move into residence halls, most of the University's 770-plus returning and new faculty members gathered inside Jones Concert Hall for the first faculty meeting of the semester.

Undoubtedly on the minds of many was the onslaught of media reports that have been focused on Baylor throughout the summer -- not only about the men's basketball program (see story on page ____) but also about pockets of dissension among alumni regarding Baylor 2012, the University's 10-year vision. The latest media volley came from that morning's editions of the *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, both of which carried articles purporting a faculty member would call for a no-confidence vote on Baylor President Robert B. Sloan Jr. at its first Faculty Senate meeting Sept. 9.

In *The Dallas Morning News* article, Linda K. Wertheimer reported that Henry Walbesser, professor of computer science and Faculty Senate member, said he would make the motion for a no-confidence vote of Dr. Sloan and his administration at the early September meeting.

"This is a time when the University needs a unifying figure," said Charles Weaver, professor of psychology and neuroscience and a frequent critic of the Sloan administration. "Is he the right person right now? He's such a divisive figure. I'm not sure that's the kind of leadership Baylor needs," according to the News report.

But even casual observers at the campus faculty meeting would have been hard-pressed to reconcile that morning's headlines with the robust and sustained applause that both Baylor President Robert B. Sloan Jr. and new Provost David Lyle Jeffrey received after their addresses to the assembly. In this particular family meeting, the respect and unity were obvious and heartfelt.

Dr. Sloan said as Dr. Jeffrey was introducing him, he decided not to use the speech he had prepared. "I clearly felt the affirmation, just walking to the platform. It was one of the most humbling and gratifying moments of my eight-plus years," Dr. Sloan said.

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At the meeting, Dr. Sloan told his colleagues it had been "a very long and hot and humbling summer," and that the loss of a student's life is "enormously overwhelming." He also said, God's "grace is sufficient for me, for all of us, for this institution in these difficult and challenging times."

Later that day, two spontaneous demonstrations occurred on campus that further indicated confidence in Dr. Sloan. In response to the morning news, Bethany McCraw, associate dean of judicial and legal student services, sent an e-mail to several co-workers calling for a show of support for the president.

"I wanted to have the opportunity to let Dr. Sloan and the regents know that I certainly had a vote of confidence in Dr. Sloan and his administration," McCraw said. She added that she was surprised at the responses, which she said came pouring back with people thanking her for taking the lead. "I think we all have been praying," she said, "but at some point, you need to not be passive."

Her request prompted a daylong volley of responses as more than 100 people on campus sent e-mails to Board of Regents chair Drayton McLane affirming their confidence in Dr. Sloan, many adding personal messages of prayerful support for and pride in his leadership of the University during difficult times.

Also in response to the morning's headlines, some faculty members planned a late afternoon, pro-Sloan rally on the steps of the Tidwell Bible Building on campus. With little advance notice, nearly 120 people gathered in the steamy mid-August heat to raise their voices in support of Baylor's 12th president.

"If the Faculty Senate proceeds with a vote of no confidence in light of the overwhelmingly positive response demonstrated today, they will surrender any pretense of being a representative body," said Dr. Barry Harvey, assistant professor of theology in the Great Texts Program and spokesperson at the rally.

Another organizer of the afternoon event was Dr. Scott Moore, assistant professor of philosophy and director of the Great Texts Program. He said the event was a response to the morning's news, which he said suggested that the Baylor faculty as a whole wanted the ouster of Dr. Sloan, which he said was "categorically untrue." In talking with faculty colleagues across campus, Dr. Moore said he hears a spectrum of opinions. "There are some people who are upset and some people would like this or that to be different, but there is a great deal of enthusiasm as well, and there are lots and lots of faculty -- old faculty, new faculty -- who are very excited to be at Baylor."

One retired faculty member present, Dr. Rufus B. Spain, professor emeritus of history and director of the Retired Professors/Administrators Program, raised concerns about 2012, saying there are many, particularly among older faculty, who see 2012 as "a departure from Baylor's tradition." He said if one wants Baylor to become a publishing and an evangelical institution -- "and that's not Baptist" -- then support 2012. "But if you want Baylor to continue to be a primarily teaching institution, then oppose 2012," Dr. Spain said.

Dr. Robert Marks, an incoming Distinguished Professor of Electrical Engineering, was introduced at the morning faculty meeting. Several hours later, he stood with his new colleagues in support of Dr. Sloan

and Baylor 2012. " I watched the family reunion (the July 18 dialogue hosted by the Baylor Alumni Association) on baylortv.com, and I was enormously proud of the leadership of both Dr. Sloan and Dr. Jeffrey," he said. "I thought they handled things gracefully but forcefully and put across their case enormously well, and I'm proud to be in their leadership. They're just remarkable people."

Another new faculty member at the rally was Dr. Sarah-Jane Murray, assistant professor of medieval literature and French in the Honors College, who said she was "very enthusiastic" to be at Baylor. "In the greater picture, things like this become mere distractions to that calling (to be in the classroom). I stand 150 percent behind the people who are captaining our boat and trying to take it to safe helm so that our students can get the best learning experience they can possibly enjoy."

Rounding out the day, Dr. Sloan met with a large crowd of freshmen and transfer students and their families for a picnic on Burleson Quad. As he mingled with families, he later said the parents had been very encouraging. "It was a deep affirmation to me of the rightness of our ambition to be a great and faithful Christian university," Dr. Sloan said. "People are sending their children here precisely because of who we have been historically and who we are today."

For the full texts of Dr. Jeffrey's and Dr. Sloan's speeches at the University-wide faculty meeting, go to the [Provost's web page](#), and [the President's web page](#) To view the faculty rally, go to [baylortv.com](#).

Additional reporting by Allison Holden and Jackie Inouye

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